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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 003527

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [KNUC](#) [UK](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: LUGOVOY DISPUTE: RUSSIAN RESTRAINT FOR NOW

REF: LONDON 2758

Classified By: DCM Daniel A. Russell. Reasons 1,4 (B/D).

11. (C) Summary: The British decision to expel four Russian diplomats and take other diplomatic measures in response to Moscow's refusal to extradite Lugovoy in the Litvinenko murder case has elicited sharp commentary by Russian legislators and pundits. The official Russian reaction, by contrast, has been more measured. Evidence of Russian restraint is seen in DFM Grushko's explicit assurances that business, tourism, scientific and cultural ties will be safeguarded. While a Russian overreaction cannot be ruled out, it appears most likely that the GOR is going to respond proportionately and is tending towards damage control. With the official GOR reaction expected by week's end, the August summer exodus should provide a natural break in the diplomatic dispute. End summary.

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MFA Promises "Adequate and Targeted" Response  
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12. (SBU) In a July 17 statement, MFA Deputy Foreign Minister Grushko listed three principal grievances in response to HMG's July 16 decision to expel four Russian diplomats, halt all cooperation with the FSB, and be more restrictive in its visa issuances to Russian officials:

--Britain should not penalize Russia for abiding by its Constitution, which forbids the extradition of Russian citizens. Grushko defended the level of law enforcement cooperation that existed on the Litvinenko affair and argued that UK expectations that Russia would amend its constitution went against common sense;

--Britain, which had refused to extradite 21 Russian citizens to Russia in the past, including controversial tycoon Boris Berezovskiy and Chechen rebel envoy Akhmed Zakayev, had no right to request Lugovoy's extradition;

--Britain was taking the path of confrontation, rather than of cooperation, while politicizing the case. Grushko called upon the EU to resist the "latest effort" to turn EU-Russian relations into a "universal instrument for achieving one-sided political goals," which ran counter to the principle of partnership.

13. (SBU) However, the fact that Grushko promised an "adequate and targeted response," without announcing immediate retaliatory measures, suggests that the GOR is tending towards restraint (e.g., a tit-for-tat expulsion of four UK diplomats), rather than a diplomatic overreaction (e.g., expulsion of the UK Ambassador). Grushko explicitly protected business, cultural, scientific and tourism ties, underscoring that Russia would factor into account the interests of common citizens. He contrasted this with the UK

decision to halt all work with the FSB, which would have the practical effect of ending UK-Russian counterterrorism cooperation, potentially affecting the interests of millions of UK and Russian citizens.

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A Harder Public Line, but No Drum Beat  
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14. (SBU) The British decision prompted a shriller public reaction among Russian legislators and pundits. Yuriy Sharandin of the Federation Council's Constitutional Committee was one of many who argued that the expulsion order was part of a broader European effort to foment "Russophobia" and paint a negative image of Russia. Duma International Relations Committee Chairman Konstantin Kosachev, typically a moderate voice, called the British demand for extradition "a form of imperialism." Kosachev added that "you can act this way toward a banana republic but Russia is not a banana republic." Several commentators attributed the conflict to the lack of common shared culture between the two countries. Frustration with HMG's lack of responsiveness to Russian requests for the extradition of Berezovskiy and Zakayev, and support for Grushko's charges of double-standards, were common themes in television and news reports. Commentators sympathizing with the UK position were in the minority, although one internet publication argued that "the man accused of killing a British citizen and infecting much of London is free and treated almost like a hero in Russia."

15. (SBU) What has been lacking, however, is an orchestrated campaign to ratchet up tensions against the UK. In particular, one dog that has not barked is the Kremlin-backed youth group, Nashi, whose activists maliciously stalked UK

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Ambassador Brenton for months, in retaliation for his speaking role at the July 2006 "Other Russia" opposition conference. (Nashi's activists -- also famed for their May siege of the Estonian Embassy -- may have been caught flat-footed by the timing of the UK announcement, which coincided with the organization's annual youth camps for activists, held in Tver -- around three hours drive from Moscow.)

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Comment  
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16. (C) Grushko's measured statement that Russia would respond in a targeted fashion and the lack of any orchestrated drumbeat in the press whipping up sentiment against the UK suggest that Russia will respond in kind to the British move and act in a reciprocal and limited fashion. While the dispute will have an inevitable chilling effect on bilateral ties, the impending August summer exodus should provide a natural break and could allow tensions to lower perhaps by the fall.  
BURNS